

## Week of January 20, 2003: MaineDOT Flash Facts

### Topic: Driver Distractions

#### Openers/Facts:

- More than 14,000 crashes each year in Maine are due to Driver Inattention or Distraction. That's 40 times every day that someone in Maine has a crash due to distractions.
- Driver Distraction or Inattention causes nearly 50 deaths and 7,000 injuries each year.
- At 50 miles per hour, your vehicle will travel 150 feet in just two seconds. (less time than it takes to find a CD or look at the map)
- About 40% of Maine's crashes are caused by driver distraction or inattention.
- From 1999 through 2001 driver inattention and distraction was a factor in:
  - About 7,500 **run off road** crashes resulting in 43 deaths and 4,000 injuries.
  - Almost 10,000 **intersection** crashes resulting in 36 deaths and over 4,000 injuries.
  - 1,400 **Head on** crashes resulting in 33 fatalities and over 900 injuries.
  - Over 23,000 **rear end** crashes that resulted in 12 fatalities and nearly 11,000 injuries.
- Driving is a full time mental and physical task.

**Closer:** (Each Day) Flash, the MaineDOT Road Model says "When Driving, Just Drive!"

#### Monday:

##### Distraction Exercise:

*Which of the following activities do you do while you're driving?*

- Change a CD or a radio station
- Eat or drink
- Make a phone call
- Reach for something in the back seat
- Reach for (and maybe even read) a map
- Turn to talk to the passengers (even backseat!)
- Fix your hair, shave, put on make-up or other personal grooming
- Focus your mind on something other than driving

*Every one of these distracts you from your driving and puts you in danger of a crash.*

*Consider how long it takes for another car to leave a driveway; for a moose to step into the roadway; for a child to dart into the street? If you are distracted at that same moment, even for just a second, the results can be tragic.*

Most trips are uneventful, with few or no road problems. But unexpected events do happen and if you're distracted at that moment, things may never be the same for you and others involved. It happens 14,000 times a year -or 40 times a day- on Maine roads.

**Be a Road Model:** Stay focused on the driving.

**Reminder:** Conditions on the road are constantly changing.

-Keep your attention sharp by varying your view of the road and shifting to different perspectives (go from watching the road ahead to checking out the upcoming intersection, to looking at driveways for possible moving vehicles, to checking your mirrors...).

## **Wednesday**

### **Distraction Exercise:**

*Think about what it takes to just put a CD into the player in your vehicle.*

1. Find the CD you want
2. Open the CD case (hard enough at home, much less in a car)
3. Take the CD out of the case
4. Insert CD into player
5. Put away the old CD

*(How long was your attention on the CD, not your driving?)*

### **Alternate Distraction Exercise:**

*Think about what is involved in making a cell phone call:*

1. Reach for the phone
2. Dial the phone number (you may first need to look for the phone number)
3. Press send
4. Chat
5. Hang Up
6. Set the phone down

*All with only one hand on the wheel! (How long was your attention on making the phone call and not your driving?)*

**Be a Road Model:** Don't let conveniences in your car become driving distractions.

### **Other Reminders:**

Distractions can be Visual (not watching what's on the road) and Mental (thinking about things other than your driving). Both are very dangerous and can cause you to miss what's happening on the road until it's too late.

- Avoid activities that take your mind and eyes off the road.
- The car is not the place to make up time by tending to non-driving activities.
- "Just Drive" -Leave multi-tasking to times of the day when you're not driving.
- Watch for others who may not be paying attention.
- Drive at a reasonable speed.

## **Friday**

### **Distraction Exercise:**

*Next time you are involved in a serious phone call at work or at home, ask yourself these questions:*

*-How much of my attention was focused on the phone call and how much on the activities around you?*

*-What happened just 10 feet away that you didn't catch (but you would have if you were not on the phone)?*

*-How well do you deal with demands outside of the phone conversation?*

*Phone calls have the same demand on your attention when you're on the road. You need to be ready to instantly respond to road emergencies.*

**Be a Road Model:** The cell phone convenience of making a call no matter where you are is terrific...but use it safely.

-If you have to make a call, stop the car at a safe off-road location, or

-Have your passengers make the phone call for you.

**Other Reminders:**

-Be aware that road and traffic conditions are constantly changing. (especially this time of year, pavement can turn slippery very quickly.)

-Keep your eyes and mind continually on the road.

-If something is going to take your attention away from driving, pull safely off the road first (not just onto the shoulder)

-Keep music volumes at a safe level. Loud music blocks out warning sounds (sirens, screeching brakes, horns). Keep your ears open to outside sounds.

You can prevent a crash. Before you do something that takes attention away from driving, ask yourself: "How important is that... phone call; picking up the dropped baby toy; or struggling with the CD case?" Is it worth risking a crash that can injure or kill you, your passengers, or someone else? Remember, inattention causes 40 crashes every day in Maine. Don't let inattention make you a statistic.